

David has a knack with a 'shack'

BY KIREN GHEI
Post-Crescent staff writer

He is only 14 years old, spends a lot of time with a "shack," has made more than 250 important contacts — and has something extra special.

David Koberstein, son of Robert and Sharon Koberstein, 23 Winona Court, recently became one of the youngest ham radio operators in the state to hold the highest Federal Communications Commission ham radio license attainable. The license is called the "extra."

Using his "shack" (ham slang for his radio and equipment), which he spends about two hours a day with, he has made more than 250 "contacts" on the air with other radio operators.

David went from the lowest license awarded by the FCC, "novice," to the highest in only 7½ months.

To get his "extra," David had to be able to send and receive Morse code at a speed of 22 words per minute and had to learn and know quite a bit of electronic theory. "I worked on it," he said, grinning.

He joined about 250 other "extras" in the state. There are about 300,000 hams worldwide.

David explained that his knack for learning code made it relatively easy for him to increase his sending and receiving speed. Learning the code was like learning a foreign language, he said.

He said that learning the required electronic the-

ory, which includes understanding amplifiers, television interference, radio waves and complex formulas, wasn't a chore because "you're doing it on your own will." He said the theory really only comes in handy when part of his "shack" needs fixing.

David's interest in ham radios was prompted by his father's suggestion last year that they both take up the hobby. Koberstein, a physician, has a "technician's" license, which is one step above a "novice."

David received a ham radio for his birthday and has since acquired accessory equipment, ranging from an electronic Morse code keyer to an antenna turner to a code filter (which cuts out interference from other waves). The shack is set up in his bedroom on an old sewing table.

Making contacts with other operators and relaying messages for them is the prime activity of hams, according to David. "The whole idea behind it is helping people," he said.

David's earliest attempts at making contacts were "frustrating."

"Now I can go on and get a contact any time I want," he said.

Experience and practice are the only ways to become better at making contacts, he believes.

"It's just the excitement" of contacts that makes his hobby fun, the conversations "don't seem that great," he said.

David prefers to use Morse code, not voice, to send his call — WB9YMG — and in communicating with other operators. "It's just a little more of a challenge," he said. His more than 250 contacts have come from as far as Cuba, Costa Rica, and various parts of Canada.

He is working toward an "All-states Radio given out by the American Relay League, Inc., to operators making contacts in all 50 states. So far, David has reached hams in 39.

David has heard calls sent out by foreigners, but his responses have never been acknowledged. This is frustrating, he said, because he is never sure if the foreigner even heard his call.

David used the example of "nets" to illustrate the potentialities of ham radios. Ham operators relay messages for operators who want to send a message farther than their equipment is capable of sending it. He said a message could go from Connecticut to Texas in a day, at no charge to the sender, of course.

David also said that in case of a disaster or local emergency, ham radios can be used to send quick messages.

Although the air gets crowded at times, David said he has never heard any "really interesting" conversations, primarily because they are illegal.

He belongs to the Neenah Marc Club, a group of about 30 area hams of all ages. Anyone interested in

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Post-Crescent photo

David Koberstein sitting at his ham radio

Ham radio. . .

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joining the club should call Scott Salin at 739-5450, David said.

"It's fun, and you meet people," said David.

His mother added: "It keeps him busy, and he and his dad have something they can do together."

David will a sophomore at Appleton High School-East this fall. Included in his future are "girls," perhaps flying and work in electronic engineering.